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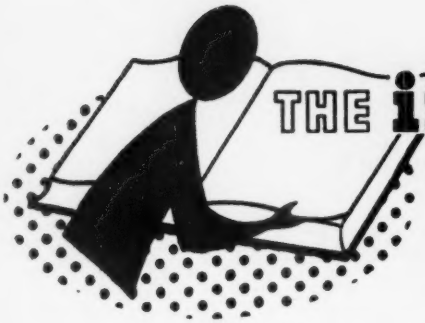

THE im ENCYCLOPEDIA OF MARKETING

A basic guide to better Technical Publicity

BY PETER J. B. STEVENS

INDUSTRIAL MARKETING
im

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By Peter J. B. Stevens

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TRADITIONALLY, PUBLIC RELATIONS has been preoccupied with creating the organizational image, with building the personal reputation, and with promoting, in the language of the general public, a product or service. Today, in answer to the challenge of changing times, public relations has been thrust into a new and dynamic sphere of persuasive influence.

Contemporary public relations is faced with a new audience. It is different in character, different in interests, and different in vocabulary, from that with which it has been previously concerned.

The scientists, the engineers and the technicians are busily engaged in reshaping the world.

Reshaping the world . . This new audience is composed of a new group of men who are exercising a

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growing and widening influence in business and industrial affairs. They are the scientists, the engineers, and the technicians who are busily engaged in reshaping the world we know into the forms and patterns of tomorrow.

Public relations today must speak in the distinctive language of science and technology in talking to these architects of the future. And what it says must be based on an understanding of their attitudes, their methods, and, most importantly, their goals, both for themselves and for society.

The need to communicate with this new technological audience has forced the quick evolution of organizations unique in public relations practice. They are organizations that have added to the standard skills of the profession a new element: that of technical cognizance. They combine in one group the basic engineering and technical background that is needed for a general assessment of what is currently significant in science and technology; the fundamental writing skill that is needed to translate design concepts and equipment descriptions into concise, clear technical statements; and the essential familiarity with publication methods and practices that is needed to shape information into the forms best suited to editorial treatment.

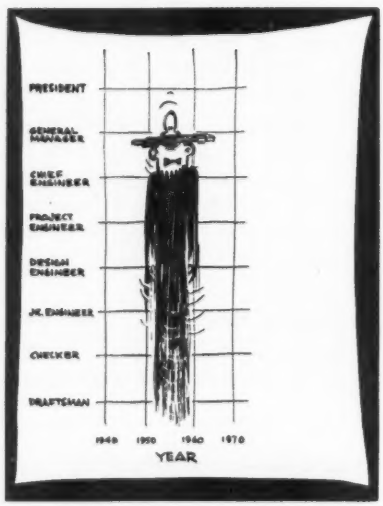
They are not to be confused with the purely technical writers who ably produce handbooks, manuals or parts catalogs. The technical communication specialists, however, add to the trained engineering competence a sense of what is significant sales-wise, and a sense of what is important corporate-wise. This is the mark of the experienced technical editor as opposed to the mere reporter.

The Shape of the New World

How important are the audiences to which technical communication specialists are addressing their messages?

The answer to that question lies in a startling development of the past ten years. Within this short span of time, an explosive acceleration of scientific and technological progress has bombarded our business and industrial societies with an impact whose outlines are only now firming into forms that can be adequately weighed and measured for significance.

This much, however, is already apparent. Entire new businesses and industries have sprung up in the wake of the past decade's onrush of technological advances. Moreover, the methods and organization-



A startling development of the past ten years . .

al patterns of many older businesses are being radically altered under the pressures of such current technical phenomena as automation, computerization, and self-operating process controls.

They do the buying . . An important aspect of these suddenly burgeoning scientific and technical forces is the emergence of the engineer and technician as increasingly influential factors in company operations. Nowhere is this more apparent than in their growing authority to decide what is to be bought, and why.

In many instances, this authority is now being exercised directly in the engineering department. The nature of the engineer's design, and his specification—not only of equipment types, but of particular equipment items—frequently determines both the product to be purchased and its manufacturer long before his drawings have left the design department.

The same is broadly true in the procurement of specialized technical services.

Almost without exception, materials and equipment designed into a component or system cannot be shopped out by a purchasing agent. Nor is it likely that materials and equipment called out in the engineering specifications will be substituted. The sale is made at the design stage and confirmed in the statement of specifications.

Nor is the influence of the engineering mind limited only to the lines on his blueprints and the callouts of his specifications.

Reaching executive level . . Before the scientific and technical stampede of the past decade, engineering personnel was almost entirely limited in interest and function to the drafting board and laboratory. His concern with the management phases of business and industry was, at most, cursory.

More and more men trained in engineering are moving into the executive levels of American management.

This is no longer true. More and more men trained in engineering are moving into the executive policy levels of American management, either through the formation of their own companies or by promotion from within.

The trend is a natural outgrowth of the increasing importance of scientific and technological developments to the expansion and success of business and industry generally, and especially to those organizations engaged in some aspect of today's missile age and tomorrow's space age.

The Key to New Buying Influences

For a long time to come, the technically trained, technically experienced scientist and engineer will exert a strong influence on the rising and falling tides of business and industry.

The engineer will exert a strong influence on the rising and falling tides of business and industry.

The key to reaching these new engineering buyers in old markets and new markets is technical communication. This is the art of conveying technical information to the technical public in the form and language of science and technology.

It is also accomplished through papers presented before scientific and engineering societies, and through the technical and professional press which also has grown tremendously in stature and importance during the past decade. So fast has the forward course of scientific and technological progress been in the last ten years that developments are consistently running ahead of formal literature.

Essential textbooks . . Today's engineer and technician must literally educate himself on a day to day basis to keep abreast of the work in his field. And in this continual self-education, technical publications are his textbooks. They are the medium by which scientists, engineers and technicians exchange current information of common interest.

As an indication of the need and influence of the technical press, there are, at present, more than 4,000 separate publications devoted to the supply of technical and professional information to technical and professional readers in this country.

They cover every possible area of professional interest. And they are specialized to the extent that many of them devote major attention to simply one phase of a specific industry, such as design, or production, or sales, or management.

This specialization of the professional press both simplifies and complicates the problem of manufacturing or service suppliers with sales messages to transmit. It means that if they word their message in the proper language, and send their message to the proper publication, they can reach their potential customers quickly and directly.

It also means that if these two things are not done, they will be operating in disastrous anonymity.

Since few companies, unless they are very large, can afford a full-time technical public relations staff,

the new type of outside consulting and servicing agency specializing in technical communications is being used increasingly by business and industry. Such agencies are being used to make sure the company's story is being brought properly to potential customers who read the technical press for fact, guidance and education.

Five Advantages of Technical PR Specialists

FIVE readily apparent advantages recommended the employment of an external agency for these technical public relations services.

1. The cost is less when all expenses are considered. The external agency requires no office space, supplies, secretarial services, telephones, or other indirect items. In the company, these hidden expenses frequently equal the direct amounts of the salaries. Nor is there any standby expense with the external agency. They are only paid when they are working.

The varied outlook of an external group assures objectivity.

2. The program can be expanded and contracted as required by the company's varying management situation, financial position and marketing activities without the need of continually building and reducing a staff, an unsatisfactory procedure at best.

3. The varied outlook of an external group gained from serving a number of organizations working in different fields assures an objective view that is valuable in recommending proper courses and taking appropriate action in the interests of the client.

4. Technical and professional editors appreciate and depend upon the competent agency as an important source of timely and accurate information furnished in a readily useable form. General acceptance of agency-placed editorial material is very high.

5. Scientists, engineers and technicians are very busy people whose prime concern is properly with their work and not with the dissemination of material regarding it. The technical public relations agency serves the company, technical publications, and business and industry by assuming the responsibility for gathering the information that already has been developed, and by organizing, writing, and editing it into a form suitable for wide distribution.

Three Ways to Communicate Technically

THREE main avenues of communication are employed by the technical public relations staff to convey technical information to the specialized audience of the scientific and technical world. They are:

1. Editorial information prepared first for personal presentation by a single individual before a scientific or technical society, and then prepared for publication in the technical press.

2. Editorial information prepared for placement in the technical press.

3. Specialized sales information prepared by the company for mailing directly to potential customers.

The vehicles used on these avenues of communication to carry information fall into four main groups. They are the scientific paper, the technical article, the sales slanted news release, and an assortment of company-initiated and company-controlled printed materials distributed directly to potential customers by the company.

To further an understanding of these tools of technical communication, a brief description and discussion of each follows.

The Scientific Paper

MEETINGS and conventions of engineering societies provide an excellent opportunity for the presentation of a company's technical skills and assets. Papers given at such meetings find their way into the literature of technology and are often picked up by magazines as the basis of future articles.

It is worth while, therefore, to put as much professional polish into scientific or technical papers as possible—compatible with the primary purpose of the paper as a progress report to a professional group.

Agency practice, in this case, is to work alongside the engineer, suggesting a logical organization of his material, helping with illustrations, charts and slides, and untangling his syntax before the final draft goes to the typist. At the same time the agency is careful not to stifle the feeling of controlled enthusiasm that characterizes a researcher or engineer when he is "ready to publish." For the sake of the engineer and his company, the report must ring true.

The Technical Article

FACTUAL information, not high-pressure salesmanship, is what sells scientific and industrial products. The scientific and industrial buyer makes his decision on the basis of price, quality, and confidence in the manufacturer. Frequently, the two latter are the determinants of the purchase.

Brochures, catalogs, advertisements and salesmen's calls are all effective ways of transmitting infor-

A customer is not buying hardware so much as engineering know-how.

mation on price, quality, and, of course, availability of the product or service.

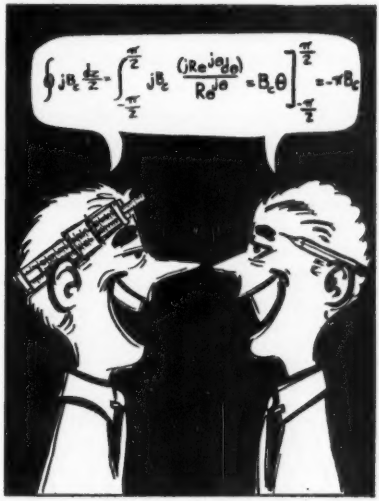
But how do you build confidence?

Prompt delivery of quality products at competitive prices over a long period of time is one sure way. But this is not enough when the product line is subject to rapid technological change, or the specifying and buying groups are in a state of flux.

When this is the case, a special selling tool is needed—the *technical article*, written in collaboration with technical experts and by-lined by a member of the client organization.

When a customer buys a new or improved product, he is not buying hardware so much as engineering know-how. And the "customer" in this case is not just the purchasing agent, but even more importantly the engineering group that must evaluate and specify the product.

The problem, then, is communication with engineers. This is the task of the technical article. Placed in publications where engineers will read it, the technical article builds markets for a new product by building confidence in the engineering capabilities of the company which designed and produced it.



The problem, then, is communicating with engineers in their own language.

The Sales Slanted Release

THE sales slanted release may take the form of new product announcements, new service announcements, new applications announcements and, finally, new available literature announcements.

To understand the value of the sales slanted release, it is necessary to recognize a secondary function of the technical publication today. It

serves as a perpetual up-to-date catalog of technical products and services currently available.

For that reason editors solicit, and subscribers read, properly written editorial material in this category.

The fact that the information appears in editorial form, lends believability to what is essentially sales information.

Again the engineering background of the technical communications staff permits the sales to be based on the significant facts of the disclosure, and to be couched in the language of the technical reader. Product and service news items are not prepared in terms of trick slogans or fancy art work. It sells because it conveys factual information of value to the reader.

Product and service news items are not prepared in terms of trick slogans or fancy artwork.

Collateral Promotional Material

Non-technical writers collaborating with non-sales-minded engineers produce a compromise which leaves everyone somewhat dissatisfied and frustrated.

THE preparation of technical sales literature—brochures, catalogs, reprints and proposals—is itself an art. It involves a thorough understanding of the graphic arts, of copywriting, of all the techniques of industrial merchandising.

Unfortunately, the advertising man who has these skills is rarely an engineer. Without too much understanding of the subject, he frequently finds himself faced with the need to condense, simplify and interpret a great mass of engineering data, picking out what he feels is important and relative. The engineers who will check his work, on the other hand, have little or no understanding of the objectives or methods of a sales presentation. The result is generally a compromise that leaves everyone somewhat dis-

couraged, dissatisfied and frustrated.

The role of the agency is to bridge this gap, working with both parties to find a way to present the necessary engineering information in a manner that will meet the selling requirements of the literature being prepared.

Summary

THE justification for various technical communications activities is found in the benefits accruing from:

1. Gaining acceptance from the scientific and technical community of the company's engineering and technical capabilities. The projection and maintenance of a proper corporate image is an important sales aid, and is also a potent technical employe recruiting inducement.

2. Giving wide distribution to the scientific and engineering community of the facts about the range of the company's services and products, of the facts about the performance abilities of those products, and of the facts about the operation and the possible applications of the products. Services and products will not be bought and used unless they are known to be in existence. They will be viewed with suspicion if the principles of their operation are not technically understood.

For maximum effectiveness, the promotion of scientific and technological products and services through technical communication must be accomplished through a well rounded, well balanced program of information transmission. The program must be planned far in advance and executed in terms of each client's particular situation.

It must be a carefully correlated activity in which the company, the technical communications agency, and the editors of trade publications participate—to their mutual benefit—in a service of the greatest value to that growing body of scientists, engineers and technicians whose opinions and decisions are increasingly determining the basic market trends of technological services and products. ■

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